



Role of Meditation in Holistic Development of the Students

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Abstract

Education in ancient India aimed not merely acquiring the knowledge for worldly life but for the full realization of one's potential and liberation of self. The goal of the National Education Policy 2020 is not only to develop cognitive capacities but also develop good human beings, capable of critical thinking and rational behaviour; developing scientific temper; creative imagination, courage, resilience, compassion, empathy and moral values. In view of increasing personal and societal problems deteriorating mental health of people, the need of the hour is to adapt that education system which encourage holistic development of the students and prepare them not only for academic success but also for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in future in their personal, professional, social and spiritual lives. Meditation was a very important part of ancient education system and students practiced meditation under the supervision of the teacher in Gurukul. In ancient time meditation was basically spiritual and philosophical practice but in present complicated times, meditation is being practiced for healing of mental and physical illnesses and improving cognitive, emotional, social capacities. Objective of the present paper reviews studies depicting the role of meditation in holistic development for students lives.

Key Words: Meditation, holistic development, education system, students

Introduction

In Indian thought and philosophy, the pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragyaa), and truth (Satya) was always regarded as the ultimate human aspiration and goal. In ancient India, education was not only focused on gaining knowledge for worldly pursuits or future careers; instead, it emphasized the complete realization of one's potential and liberation of the self. The ultimate goal of learning was to attain inner wisdom, self-discovery, and spiritual growth.

Holistic Development of the Students

National Education Policy 2020 is proposed for holistic development of the students. It emphasises on the development of the creative potential of each student. This education policy is based on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capacities but also social, emotional and moral capacities of the

students. The goal of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of thinking and acting rationally, developing scientific temper and creative imagination, courage and resilience, filled with compassion and empathy, with sound moral base and values.

Delores Report (1996) about the futuristic education is a step forward in this direction. Delores' report(1996) proposes a new concept of education called holistic education. This report proposes that futuristic education should be humanistic, rather than instrumental focusing on formation of the whole person. It is in accordance with the principles of UNESCO which proposes that futuristic education should be based on two factors. i.e. the four pillars of education and lifelong learning. The education should be a lifelong learning process it should not stick to a particular time of life. The four pillars of education are related with **cognitive, employment, social and moral aspects** of human life. The **first pillar** of education, learning to know, is associated with education for acquisition of knowledge. The **second pillar**, learning to do, is associated with education for employment. The **third pillar** of education, learning to be is associated with social skills and developing and using one's full potential. Finally, the **fourth pillar**, learning to live together is associated with inculcation of moral values. The education system of the whole world in twenty first century emphasizes on holistic development of the students. Holistic development includes academic, emotional, social, moral and spiritual development of the students (Cloan et al., 2004).

Meditation

Meditation is a practice where a person uses a technique such as mindfulness, or focusing the mind on a specific object, thought, breath or any activity to train attention and awareness, and achieve an emotionally stable, calm and mentally clear state (Walsh, et al., 2006). In a simple word meditation is objective, non- judgemental and conscious awareness of the present movement.

Meditation was very important part of ancient Indian Knowledge System. Students practiced meditation under the supervision of the teachers in Gurukul. The earliest evidence of meditation is found in the sculptures from the **Indus Valley Civilization (2500- 1700 BCE)**. The Vedas are the first scriptures in which meditation is mentioned in **1500 BCE**.. In **500 BCE** Lord Buddha discovered Vipassana meditation in Bodhgaya, Bihar, Varanasi. This is the first meditation technique which is systematically described. Vipassana meditation has three stages, **first** is Sila (five moral code of conduct), **second** is Samadhi(breathing mindfulness) and **third** is Punna (Insight). Vipassana also involves a special kind of practice known as Metta Bhavana (loving kindness). In **200 BC** Maharshi Patanjali systematically described about Astang yoga in his book yoga sutra. This has eight limbs; Yamas (abstinences), Niyama(observances), Asanas(posture), Pranayama (breathing), Pratyahara (withdrawal), Dharana(concentration), Dhyana(meditation) and Samadhi (absorption). In present time there are many types of meditation practicing all over the world. Some popular meditations are Raj yoga, Hath yoga, Heartfulness, Loving Kindness Meditation etc.

In ancient time meditation was spiritual, philosophical and religious practices. But in modern time meditation is used as a therapy in healing mental problems i. e. anxiety, stress, depression etc by the psychologist. In present time the importance of meditation is increasing day by day in higher education (Shapiro et al.,2008), as well as in all education system.

Empirical Evidences

- **Impact of Meditation on Brain Physiology**

Research conducted at Yale University has shown that mindfulness meditation reduces the activity of the default mode network (DMN). DMN is the part of the brain associated with mind-wandering and self-referential thoughts. Meditation practice decreases the activity of sympathetic nervous system while enhancing the activity of parasympathetic nervous system, promoting a state of relaxation and calm mind. Meditation has been found to produce structural and functional changes in areas of the brain like the hippocampus, insula, sensory cortices, cingulate cortex, and prefrontal cortex (**Gotink et al., 2016**).

These changes, driven by neural plasticity, support prosocial behavior and contribute to academic success (**Davidson & McEwen, 2012**). **Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnston, and Davidson (2008)** found in their studies that mental training enhances activity in the brain's cortical regions linked to empathy and compassion. These changes increase altruistic behaviour (**Weng et al., 2013**). Meditation practices foster prosocial behaviour and contribute to academic success by promoting neural plasticity (**Davidson et al., 2012; Davidson & McEwen, 2012**).

- **Impact of Meditation on Cognitive Development and Academic Achievement**

Mindfulness Meditation helps in increasing attention, information processing, and creativity (**Shapiro et al., 2008**). **Waters, Bursky, Ridd and Allen (2014)** proposed a conceptual model based on a meta-analysis of fifteen studies examining the impact of various forms of meditation on cognitive function, emotional regulation, social competence, academic performance, and well-being. They suggested that meditation initially impacts on cognitive functions such as attention, information processing, working memory, creativity, cognitive flexibility, executive function, and meta-cognition. Additionally, meditation regulates emotions. Following these primary effects on cognition and emotional regulation, meditation subsequently influences well-being, social competence, and academic achievement, which are ultimately linked to student success.

Ching, Koo, Tsai, and Chen (2015) investigated the impact of mindfulness meditation on learning and cognitive performance using a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests. Results showed that the experimental group demonstrated improved learning effectiveness and scored higher in attention and memory measures of cognitive performance after completing the mindfulness meditation course.

Wimmer, Bellingarth, and Stockhausen (2016) examined the cognitive effects of mindfulness training on a sample of 34 fifth-grade students. The interventions took place twice weekly over 18 weeks, with one session lasting 60 minutes and another 90 minutes. Findings indicated that mindfulness training led to improved scores in cognitive inhibition (decreasing distractions) and information processing.

Harne (2017) examined the effects of mindfulness meditation on strengthening cognitive skills and attitudes toward learning in kindergarten and 2nd-grade students. Over a six-week period, students participated in daily 10-minute mindfulness meditation sessions. The findings showed an overall improvement in attention, working memory, executive functions, and a more positive attitude toward learning. The ability to regulate attention and emotion are forms of self-regulation that provide the basis for school readiness by supporting adaptive dispositions to learn and maintaining positive social relationships (**Blair, 2002**).

Ding, Tang, Tang, and Posner (2014) found that meditation enhances creativity by improving performance on divergent thinking tasks. **Lorenza, Colzato, Dominique, and Bernhard (2014)** observed that different types of meditation yield different effects on creativity. Participants showed improvement on divergent thinking tasks following Open Monitoring meditation, but this effect was not observed with Focused Attention meditation. In contrast, **Domino (1977)** reported that meditation did not influence creativity scores.

- **Impact of Meditation on Emotional Development**

Meditation regulates the thought, attention and emotion (**Cahn & Polich, 2006; Slagter, et. al., 2011**). Self-regulation involves managing emotions, thoughts, and behaviour, and it has been associated with academic achievement and social competence (**Eisenberg et al., 2004 ; Spinrad et al., 2006**). Mindfulness Meditation helps in improving emotional reactions, positive psychological states, preparedness and interpersonal relationship skills, decreasing stress level, anxiety, and depression (**Shapiro et al., 2008**).

Valosek, Link, Mills, Rainforth, and Nidich (2018) investigated the effects of Transcendental Meditation on emotional intelligence and perceived stress among government employees. Assessments using the Emotional Quotient Inventory and the Perceived Stress Scale indicated that the TM program enhanced emotional intelligence and reduced perceived stress.

- **Impact of Meditation on Social Development**

Waghmare (2019) found in his study that Anapana mediation improves attention, memory, creativity, and expression ability, decreases peer pressure, anxiety, stress and helps in helping behaviour, value inculcation of the students. He also told that Anapana Meditation is helpful in holistic education of the students. Meditation improves social- emotional competency and decreasing oppositional behaviour and aggression (**Schonert et al., 2010**). Mindfulness based kindness training enhance prosocial behaviour and academic achievement (**Flook et al., 2015**)

Conclusion

In present time there are many problem related to students like anxiety, stress, depression, suicide, weak concentration, indiscipline, cheating in examination, bullying, violence, aggression etc. These are the very common and serious problems of the education system. A holistic education system nurtures students' comprehensive growth, equipping them with the academic skills and the resilience needed to navigate personal, professional, social, and spiritual dimensions of life. This approach fosters lifelong learning, integrating academics with personal development, emotional intelligence, ethical values, and practical skills for real-world problem-solving.

There are numerous studies which show the effects of meditation on cognition, creativity, emotional intelligence, value inculcation, prosocial behaviour and academic achievement. These studies highlighted improvements in specific cognitive areas following different meditation practices. In this review study it was found that practice of meditation improves the expressing ability, social- emotional competence, helps in value inculcation as well as holistic education of the students and decreases oppositional behaviour and aggression.

Studies related to the role of meditation in mental, emotional & physical health, and social, academic & spiritual achievement show positive impact of meditation on these variables. Thus meditation may be a very effective technique to solve these students related problem and for holistic development of the students in education systems. The mechanism which might explain this impact is neuroplasticity, i.e. the ability of brain to restructure or rewire itself when adapting to change. Practice of meditation decreases the activity of sympathetic arousals and enhances the soothing effect of parasympathetic nervous system.

In view of the pronounced impact of meditation on holistic development of students, it is recommended, therefore that meditation should be made a part of curriculum in present education system.

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